

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2019

Remarks at a Wreath-Laying Ceremony at the Pentagon Memorial in Arlington, Virginia

September 11, 2019

The President. Well, thank you very much, Secretary Esper. Today our Nation honors and mourns the nearly 3,000 lives that were stolen from us on September 11, 2001. On these grounds, 184 people were murdered when Al Qaida terrorists overtook American Airlines Flight 77 and crashed it into the Pentagon. For every American who lived through that day, the September 11 attack is seared into our soul. It was a day filled with shock, horror, sorrow, and righteous fury.

I vividly remember when I first heard the news. I was sitting at home watching a major business television show early that morning. Jack Welch, the legendary head of General Electric, was about to be interviewed, when all of a sudden, they cut away. At first, there were different reports: It was a boiler fire. But I knew that boilers aren't at the top of a building. It was a kitchen explosion in Windows on the World. Nobody really knew what happened. There was great confusion.

I was looking out of a window from a building in Midtown Manhattan directly at the World Trade Center when I saw a second plane, at a tremendous speed, go into the second tower. It was then that I realized the world was going to change. I was no longer going to be—and it could never, ever be that innocent place that I thought it was.

Soon after, I went down to Ground Zero with men who worked for me to try to help in any little way that we could. We were not alone. So many others were scattered around trying to do the same. They were all trying to help.

But for the families who join us, this is your anniversary of personal and permanent loss. It's the day that has replayed in your memory a thousand times over. The last kiss. The last phone call. The last time hearing those precious words, "I love you." Then, the attack. The anguish of knowing your family member had boarded one of these flights or was working in the World Trade Center or serving right here at the Pentagon.

You waited, you prayed, you answered that most dreaded call, and your life changed forever. To each of you: The First Lady and I are united with you in grief, we come here in the knowledge that we cannot erase the pain or reverse the evil of that dark and wretched day, but we offer you all that we have: our unwavering loyalty, our undying devotion, and our eternal pledge that your loved ones will never, ever be forgotten.

Eighteen years ago, the terrorists struck this citadel of power and American strength. But the enemy soon learned that they could not weaken the spirit of our people. In times of distress, the heart of the American patriot only grows stronger and more determined.

Even in the midst of the attack, the world witnessed the awesome power of American defiance. Forty passengers and crew on Flight 93 rose up, fought back, and thwarted the enemy's wicked plans. In their final moments, these American heroes thunderously declared that we alone decide our fate.

We saw American perseverance in the valiant New York firefighters, police officers, first responders, military, and everyday citizens who raced into the crashing towers to rescue innocent people. One such American was retired Army Colonel Rick Rescorla, who gave his life on 9/11. Rick earned the Silver Star and the Purple Heart for his service in Vietnam. He later became the vice president for Security at Morgan Stanley in the World Trade Center. On the day of the

attack, Rick died while leading countless others to safety. His selfless action saved approximately 2,700 lives.

Today I am honored to announce that we will soon be awarding the late Rick Rescorla the Presidential Citizens Medal for his extraordinary sacrifice. Though Rick has left this Earth, we will ensure that the memory of his deeds will never, ever be forgotten. His memory will forever endure. Thank you. Thank you, Rick. Thank you, Rick. *[Applause]* Thank you, Rick.

Here on the western side of the Pentagon, we saw brave men and women rush into the fire and race into the scorching flames to rescue their colleagues. When evil seeks to do us harm, the incredible men and women of the United States military answer with unyielding valor and unstoppable resolve.

Navy Admiral David Thomas crawled through live wires and helped lift a wall of debris to save the life of a colleague. As Admiral Thomas remembers, "It was the worst day of my life, but the heroism and selfless disregard I saw that [horrible] morning is forever burned in my heart." Admiral Thomas, America salutes you and every patriot who defied evil that day. Thank you very much, Admiral. Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you very much.

Army Ranger Chris Braman repeatedly went back inside the burning building, rescuing one injured person after another. Before he entered, he said a prayer and asked God to give him strength, and then he dove into the suffocating smoke and fumes and flames. At the same time, Sheila Moody had just prayed that someone would find her. Then, she heard Chris's voice. As Sheila says, God sent Chris as her guardian angel. To Sheila and Chris, America is strengthened by your goodness and your grace and your bravery. Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you very much.

To fulfill our unbreakable promise to every survivor and family of 9/11, earlier this year, we fully reauthorized the Victims Compensation Fund to the tune of billions and billions of dollars.

Since September 11, nearly 6 million young men and women have joined the United States Armed Forces. They have crossed seas, climbed mountains, trekked through deserts, and rushed into enemy compounds to face down the threat of radical Islamic terrorism.

Nearly 7,000 servicemembers have laid down their lives to protect our home, our flag, and our American way of life. American freedom survives only because there are patriots willing to sacrifice everything in its defense. No tribute is sufficient to convey the infinite depth of our nation's gratitude. On this solemn day of remembrance, our thoughts also turn to the 200,000 valiant soldiers, sailors, airmen, coastguardsmen, and marines who are now, at this very moment, stationed overseas.

We do not seek conflict, but if anyone dares to strike our land, we will respond with the full measure of American power and the iron will of the American spirit. And that spirit is unbreakable.

We had peace talks scheduled a few days ago. I called them off when I learned that they had killed a great American soldier from Puerto Rico and 11 other innocent people. They thought they would use this attack to show strength. But actually, what they showed is unrelenting weakness. The last 4 days, we have hit our enemy harder than they have ever been hit before, and that will continue.

And if, for any reason, they come back to our country, we will go wherever they are and use power the likes of which the United States has never used before. And I'm not even talking about nuclear power. They will have never seen anything like what will happen to them.

No enemy on Earth can match the overwhelming strength, skill, and might of the American Armed Forces. And we have rebuilt and strengthened the last 2½ years, spending \$700 billion,

\$716 billion, and now, just approved, \$738 billion, more money, by far, than ever spent on our Armed Forces. You are the fearless sentinels who stand watch over all that we cherish and everything we hold sacred, priceless, and dear.

This morning we also give thanks to the dedicated men and women at the Department of Homeland Security. Their department was created after 9/11 to help secure our immigration system and ensure that those who threaten our people are denied entry to our shores. We're indebted to every law enforcement official—State, local, and Federal—who devotes their life to keeping America safe.

As we gather at this moment, and at this incredible memorial, we are reminded that there is no greater testament to our fallen heroes than the presence of their families who knew and loved them so much. Among the family members here today is Stephanie Dunn. Her husband, Navy Commander Patrick Dunn, was one of the patriots who gave his life, right here, 18 years ago. Before he left that morning, Patrick gave Stephanie a big, beautiful kiss. Then, for the first time, he leaned down and kissed her pregnant stomach. Stephanie was just 2 months along with their first child. Earlier this year, their daughter Allie celebrated her 17th birthday.

Allie grew up into a strong, truly remarkable young woman. She mentors the children of our Nation's wounded warriors, and recently, I was honored to give Allie the President's Volunteer Service Award for her hundreds of hours of community service. We are blessed to have Allie here with us at today's ceremony. Thank you, Allie. Thank you. Thank you.

And, Allie, I know your dad is watching over you. He's right up there. He's watching from Heaven, looking down right now with love and pride. He is so proud of you. Thank you very much. [Applause] Incredible.

Also joining us is the Vigiano family. For generations, the Vigiano family has served in our military and in the New York City Fire and Police Departments. These are two great departments. I grew up with them. I know. On September 11, NYPD Detective Joseph Vigiano rushed into the World Trade Center and died rescuing his fellow citizens. His brother John was a New York firefighter. He also gave his life that day at Ground Zero.

At the time, Joseph's three sons were just young boys, ages 8, 6, and 3 months old. This morning they are with us. The youngest, John, just started his freshman year of college at SUNY Maritime College, and he plans to join the military. Joseph Jr. is a Marine reservist and, just like his father, he is a proud member of the NYPD. And James is a corporal in the Marines. On his last deployment, James was stationed on the USS *New York*, a ship made using 24 tons of steel from the World Trade Center. Every time he left the mess hall on his way to his bunk, he passed a picture of his dad.

To John, Joseph, and James, and to the Vigiano family, you have sacrificed beyond measure, and you will never, ever stop giving back to this country. And thank you very much for being here. Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you. Very proud of you. Thank you. Thank you very much.

The heroes present today remind us of an immortal truth. The future of our Nation is secured through the vigilance of our people; the brave men and women who tore through the gates of hell to save the hurt and the wounded; the servicemembers who honor the friends who perished by continuing their exceptional life of service; the moms and dads who endured the loss of their soulmates and fill their children's lives with all of the adoration in the world; the sons and daughters who suffered grave loss and yet, through it all, persevere to care for our neighbors, defend our homeland, and safeguard our Nation. Each of your lives tells the story of courage and character, virtue and valor, resilience and resolve, loyalty and love.

This morning we make a sacred vow to carry on this noble legacy. Today and every day, we pledge to honor our history, to treasure our liberty, to uplift our communities, to live up to our values, to prove worthy of our heroes, and above all, stronger than ever, to never, ever forget.

We are now, and will forever be, one American family united by patriotism, bound by destiny, and sustained by the faith of Almighty God. Thank you, God bless you, God bless our military, and God bless the United States of America.

Thank you all. Thank you very much. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:54 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of Defense Mark T. Esper, who introduced the President; Sgt.1st Class Elis A. Barreto Ortiz, USA, who was killed a suicide bomb attack at a checkpoint near NATO headquarters and the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan, on September 5; and Temecula, CA, resident Stephanie Ross DeSimone, widow, and Alexandra DeSimone, daughter, of Cmdr. Patrick Dunn, USN, who was killed in the Pentagon attack on September 11, 2001.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Pentagon Memorial, wreath-laying ceremony in Arlington, VA.

Locations: Arlington, VA.

Names: Barreto Ortiz, Elis A.; Braman, Christopher; DeSimone, Alexandra; DeSimone, Stephanie Ross; Esper, Mark T.; Moody, Sheila; Thomas, David M., Jr.; Trump, Melania; Vigiano, James; Vigiano, John; Vigiano, Joseph, Jr.; Welch, John F., Jr.

Subjects: Afghanistan : Suicide car bombing in Kabul; Armed Forces, U.S. : Funding; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Service and dedication; Defense, Department of : Secretary; Law enforcement and crime : Law enforcement officers, service and dedication; Terrorism : Counterterrorism efforts; Terrorism : Global threat; Terrorism : September 11, 2001, attacks; Virginia : Pentagon Memorial in Arlington; Virginia : President's visits.

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